

Lieutenant Colonel Kathryn Van Auken  
and  
Major Lauralee Flannery

U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Kathryn Van Auken and Major Lauralee Flannery were awarded the Bronze Star with "V" for valor for their sustained courage and heroic performance of duties while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Van Auken and Flannery had been serving together in Iraq in support of a Kuwait Exploitation Team's objective to secure, safe guard and assist a Kuwait forensic team in the recovery of the remains of Kuwaiti Prisoners of War and Missing from the end of the 1991 Gulf War.

Van Auken and Flannery were traveling together in the lead vehicle on February 14, 2007. They had been tasked with escorting the Kuwait Forensic Team's convoy of 12 vehicles.

It was approximately 7:30 a.m. when the middle four vehicles of the convoy were hit with the largest planned improvised explosive device (IED) attack that had been recorded up until that time.

Ten daisy-chained 155mm mortar rounds had been buried under the raised causeway they were traveling on, south of Razzazah Lake in the vicinity of Karbala, Iraq.

When these IEDs exploded three vehicles were destroyed, and passengers -- disoriented and bleeding -- began exiting their vehicles.



**The Bronze Star with 'Valor'**

"We both exited our vehicle," Van Auken said. "[MAJ Flannery] headed east and I headed west trying to gather up everyone and secure both ends of the roadway against secondary attacks."

As team leader, Van Auken deployed rapidly, undertaking a multiplicity of actions, quickly radioing instructions to move all vehicles through the smoke and debris and to follow her vehicle into safety away from the IED site to avoid secondary devices.

In this highly fluid situation, vehicles became disabled. Van Auken and Flannery quickly ordered the destroyed vehicles to be pushed out of the kill zone by follow on vehicles in the convoy in order to assemble the team and get everyone to a safe and secure distance.

Van Auken then maneuvered the front column of Polish security elements and Korean Engineer vehicles into security postures along west side of the raised causeway with great speed and determination gaining the advantage against any follow-on IED or possible ambush.

Both soldiers reacted fearlessly and without hesitation, running alone down the west end of the roadway to halt any oncoming traffic, orienting Iraqi vehicles to block the road, dismissing large crowds gathering, and re-positioning Polish security forces to assist.



# HEROES

The team provided medical assistance to their Kuwaiti team members who had been badly cut with glass and debris, and who were vomiting and shaking on the side of the road from the shocking experience.

Their actions provided an example of urgency and purpose to fellow coalition forces, and their courage under fire unquestionably saved the lives of coalition forces, particularly the civilians in their charge.

" We are battle buddies to the end," Van Auken said.

